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ABSTRACT

This study of 19 northern Michigan Ojibwa families examined antecedents to holding traditional values, and the relationship between mothers' and fathers' level of holding traditional values and their elementary school children's academic and social functioning. Participating families had a child between ages 3 and 11 years; the focal child of the study was the oldest attending elementary school. Interviews were held individually with the 15 mothers and 14 fathers comprising the sample. On the basis of interview information, the interviewers completed a scale measuring the extent to which traditional values were held. Academic functioning was assessed through teacher assigned report card grades and two Adaptive Functioning items from Achenbach's Teacher's Report Form of the Child Behavior Check List (CBCL). Social functioning was assessed by two Adaptive Functioning items from the CBCL; the Problem Behavior CBCL items; an American Indian Child Behavior Check List to assess personality traits important to American Indians; and an Index of Future Community Leadership, important in an American Indian population. Results indicated that identification with more traditional American Indian values in mothers had a beneficial impact on children's academic and social performance in school. Fathers' level of holding traditional values was not associated with his children's academic and social outcomes. Mothers' greater adherence to traditional values was associated with higher levels of parental education and higher status parental occupation. (Contains 37 references.) (KDFB)

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Abstract

This study of 19 northern Michigan Ojibwa families examined the relationship between mothers' and fathers' levels of holding traditional values and their elementary school children's academic and social functioning. Antecedents to holding traditional values were also explored. Results indicated that identification with more traditional American Indian values in mothers had a beneficial impact on their children's academic and social performance in school. However, fathers' level of holding traditional values was not significantly associated with his children's academic and social outcomes. Mothers' greater adherence to traditional values was associated with higher levels of parental education and higher status parental occupations. Results suggest that culture should come to be viewed as a tool, not an obstacle, in enhancing the school performance of American Indian children.

The Traditional Tribal Values of Ojibwa Parents and the School Performance of their Children: An Exploratory Study.

For much of the history of the United States, the cultures of American Indians have been viewed as obstructing the educational process (Dale, 1949; Ebbott, 1985; Hodgkinson, 1990; Josephy, 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990; Weeks, 1992). Although numerous improvements in the education of indigenous Americans have been made since the boarding school era of the late 1800s and the early to middle 1900s, culture clash between American Indian students, and their majority culture (usually Anglo-American) teachers, have continued into the present era (Ebbott, 1985; Weeks, 1992). Today, there is a growing literature which has begun to document the importance of American Indian traditional values for success in school (Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Sack, Beiser, Clarke, & Redshirt, 1987; Ward, 1994). However, no study has specifically examined an Ojibwa community. This study focused on a rural community of Ojibwa families and was a part of a larger project (Williams, 1995) which examined Ojibwa father (Radin, Williams, & Coggins, 1993; Williams, Radin, & Coggins, 1996a) and grandfather (Williams, Radin, & Coggins, 1996b) involvement in childrearing. The objective of this investigation was to assess the relationship between parental identification with traditional Ojibwa cultural values and the school performance of their children.

In discussing value differences between Native and majority culture Americans, the first question that must be

addressed is one of diversity among the different 500 American Indian groups (Hodgkinson, 1990). For example, in some groups of indigenous Americans a majority of tribal members still speak their tribal language and participate in tribe specific religious and social activities (Mindel & Habenstein, 1976; Red Horse, Lewis, Feit, & Decker, 1978; Weibel-Orlando, 1991). In other Native communities only a few members may speak their tribal languages (Thornton, 1987), or preserve traditions unique to their own people (Red Horse, J. G., Lewis, R., Feit, M. & Decker, J., 1978; Sue & Sue, 1991).

This heterogeneity of tradition and individual experience makes an attempt to develop a list of American Indian values difficult. Yet many social scientists feel it is possible to identify certain core values (sharing, non-interference, extended family focus, patience, etc.) which a majority of indigenous American people have in common (DuBray, 1981; Ebbott, 1985; French & Hornbuckle, 1980; Sue & Sue, 1990; Weibel-Orlando, 1991). Similarly, although the majority American culture has its own diversity (Tropman, 1989), there are certain values which scholars and researchers have identified as core values. For example, values such as, a future time orientation, competition, saving/amassing, a nuclear family focus, and social aggressiveness/assertiveness are generally considered to be values of the Anglo-American majority culture (Adrian, 1990; Charrington, 1980; Dubray, 1984; Tropman, 1989). Regardless of the fact that immigrant Americans may have come from a number of different countries and cultures, the understanding has always

been that once in the United States, they would assimilate to the already established Anglo-American core culture (Gordon, 1964; Mindel & Habenstein, 1976). This assimilative process, which was much easier for Caucasians than non-Caucasians (Schaefer, 1979), allowed immigrants the opportunity to advance economically (Schaefer, 1979).

The importance of Native values for success in school has been reported in several studies (Crawford, 1987; Deyhle, 1986; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Ward, 1994). A study of white and Sioux college students from the University of South Dakota and Black Hills State College investigated factors relating to college achievement among the 2 groups (Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986). It was found that for whites educational success was related to such factors as high school GPA and parental encouragement to attend school. However, the only predictor of academic success for the Sioux students was the retention of Native cultural traditions. Another study of Northern Cheyenne school drop-out rates discovered that residence in a traditional, homogeneous community had more of a positive effect on school completion as compared to living in a diverse community (Ward, 1994). Little is known, however, about the generalizability of these findings to rural Ojibwa families, nor to the importance of American Indian parental values for young children's school performance.

There is also no known literature which specifically discusses parental education, employment, and number of hours per week on the job as antecedents to adhering to traditional

Native values in an American Indian community. However, these demographic variables are known to influence many adult behaviors (e.g. parental involvement in childcare and family life), and they may also affect values and beliefs.

In view of the above conceptualizations and empirical data the following hypothesis was generated: that there would be a positive relationship between mothers' and fathers' levels of holding traditional values and their children's academic and social functioning on a rural Ojibwa reservation. In addition, one question, for which the scant literature did not support the formulation of hypotheses, was asked: Is there an antecedent relationship between the demographic variables of parents' age, amount of education, occupation, and the number of hours per week and parents' holding of traditional Native values?

Method

Sample

The sample was obtained from families of the Bay Mills Ojibwa Community, a reservation located on Lake Superior's Whitefish Bay near Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. To be eligible for this study, a family had to include a child in Headstart through grade 5 (i.e. age 3-11). The study's focal child was the oldest child attending elementary school. The family unit consisted of a mother, stepmother, or live-in female significant other, father, stepfather, or live-in male significant other, closest grandfather, and focal child. The sample was obtained through the cooperation of the Tribal chairman and council.

Of the 19 families who volunteered to participate in the study 17 were composed of a mother or stepmother, father or stepfather, and child. Two of the 19 family units reported that there was no father or stepfather in the home, however, there was a grandfather present and so the families were included. The response rate for the known 53 eligible two-parent families living on the reservation was 33%. Difficulties in obtaining a sample among Native American populations are not uncommon and are usually a result of mistrust of the White culture and of a research tradition which has exploited Indian culture by not taking a cultural relativistic point of view (Markstrom-Adams, 1991).

From the potential adult pool of 19 families, data were collected from 29 adults who agreed to participate; 15 mothers and 14 fathers comprised the sample. In Table 1 are presented the means and standard deviations for the sample's demographic variables.

Insert Table 1 about here

The mean ages of the mothers and fathers respectively were 34.1 and 33.7. Mothers and fathers in this sample on the average had one year of college. In the Bay Mills Indian Community as a whole, 84% of the adults had at least a high school education and 56% had some college (Sobeck, 1990). According to the Hollingshead Four-Factor Index of Social Status (1975) the mothers' average occupational rating was at the level of

clerical and sales worker while the fathers' average occupational rating was at the level of skilled manual worker and craftsman. Mothers worked an average of 40 hours per week. Fathers worked an average of 38 hours per week and this increased to about 55 hours per week during the fishing season.

The mean age for the 19 children was 8.6. For boys the mean age was 8.8 and for girls the mean age was 8.1. A two-tailed student t-test indicated no significant differences in age between the males and females. Fourteen of the children were the oldest child in their sibship, 3 children were the second born, and 2 were fifth. The mean grade in school was third for boys and girls.

Procedure

The data collection methods included completion of a questionnaire through separate interviews with the mothers and fathers of each family. The interviewers were three Ojibwa undergraduate students enrolled in the Bay Mills Community College located on the reservation, an Ojibwa employee of the Tribal Council, and an Odawa University of Michigan doctoral student from northern Michigan who is also first author of this paper. All measures were discussed and approved by the Bay Mills Tribal Council.

Independent Variables

American Indian levels of holding traditional values was assessed by a scale developed by Arthur Le Blanc Jr., a former Bay Mills tribal judge, along with the first author of this paper. The items tap attitudes toward sharing, other centered,

harmony with nature, circular time, non-interference, extended family, patience, and non-confrontation. These items have been described in the literature as characteristics of American Indian values (Brant, 1990; Lazarus, 1982). A value was posed and the respondent was asked to express agreement or disagreement using a 5-point scale. The direction of the scale was from more traditional to less traditional. The scores indicated that in general the parents were moderately traditional in their value orientation.

Dependent Variables

The variables which assessed academic functioning included teacher assigned report card grades issued in June for the school year of 1990-1991, and 2 Adaptive Functioning items, school performance and learning, from Achenbach's (Achenbach & Edlebrock, 1986) Teacher's Report Form of the Child Behavior Check List (CBCL). Social functioning was assessed by: 1) two Adaptive Functioning items from the CBCL, working hard and happy; 2) the Problem Behavior Check List items from the CBCL; 3) an American Indian Child Behavior Check List; and 4) an Index of Future Community Leadership. The latter two scales were developed on the project whose staff included three University of Michigan American Indian graduate students.

Report card grades were given in various subjects across 6 marking periods. An average was taken for the grades given in each subject. Scoring ranged from 1 (excellent) to 6 (conference requested). The lower the score the higher the

grade. Report card grades indicated that the children were doing well, averaging between good and excellent.

The Teacher's Report Form of the Child Behavior Check List (CBCL) is a valid, reliable, standardized teacher rating form about social performance for students aged 6 to 11 years (Achenbach & Edlebrock, 1986). The scales presented are from the 1986 edition of the Teacher's Report Form profile as this was the version mailed to us when the instrument was ordered. The teacher's portion yields scores in the categories of Adaptive Functioning and Problem Behavior. To determine overall school performance teachers were asked to evaluate pupils' current performance in each academic subject using a 5-point scale. A mean rating for all academic subjects was computed. The mean obtained is in the Adaptive Functioning category. To determine other aspects of adaptive functioning the teachers were asked to compare the student to typical pupils of the same age and then rate them on a 7-point scale. Children were also rated on 113 behavioral problem items on a 3-point scale. The 113 items were factor analyzed by Achenbach and his colleagues and the items were placed into 8 categories that emerged from the factor analyses, e.g., unpopular, self-destructive. These raw scores were then assigned a percentile which was provided by the manual for the CBCL (Achenbach & Edlebrock, 1986). The scores indicated that the children were at average levels of adaptation and socioemotional functioning.

An American Indian Child Behavior Check List was developed in order to assess personality traits which were important to

American Indians. The items were: (1) shows a sense of responsibility to class and school; (2) liked by others; (3) is dependable; (4) shows respect for others; (5) can take a joke; (6) and initiates new activities or ideas. The children's teachers were asked to score the children on a 3-point scale. A mean was taken of the responses of all teachers involved with the child (e.g. special education, teacher aide). The means indicated that the children were at moderate levels of adaptation.

To assess teacher expectations for the student's future community involvement, important in an American Indian population (Brant, 1990), an Index of Future Community Leadership was created. The teachers were asked what they thought the child's chances were of becoming: (a) a good member of the community; (b) a political leader in the community; and (c) a cultural leader in the community. The responses were scored on a 5-point scale and a mean was taken of the responses of all the teachers involved with the child. Chronbach's alpha was computed to assess internal consistency and the value was .95.

Results

Pearson product moment correlations were performed between the independent and dependent variables, and also between the antecedent variables and the independent variables. The significant correlations pertaining to mothers' and fathers' levels of holding traditional values and their children's

academic functioning and social functioning are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Thirty-nine correlations or 20% out of a total possible 200 correlations were significant, considerably above the number that could be expected by chance. As can be seen in Table 2, of the 39 significant correlations only in 4 or 10% of the instances were traditional maternal values associated with negative outcomes. The remaining 35 or 90% of the significant correlations showed a relationship with positive child outcomes. There were only 4 significant correlations (2% of the total possible correlations) which associated fathers' level of holding traditional values with his children's academic and social outcomes. It is possible that these correlations occurred by chance. The six cultural values of mothers found to contribute to their children's school success were sharing, other centeredness, harmony with nature, non-interference, patience, and focus on extended family.

The significant results emerging from the correlation analysis for predictors of holding traditional values are presented in Table 3. With one exception mothers' greater adherence to traditional values was associated with higher levels of parental education and higher status parental occupations (SES). It is also noteworthy that 3 of the 6 maternal values associated with child's school success were not

related to socio-economic factors: sharing, other-centeredness, and non-interference. The small sample size did not permit the computation of regression equations controlling demographic variables in predicting school outcomes from parental values.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

Because of the small sample size and the exploratory nature of this study the conclusions drawn must be treated as tentative. The findings do appear to provide insights into the importance of maintaining Ojibwa cultural identity.

The portion of the hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between mothers' levels of holding traditional values and their children's academic and social competence in school was supported. Twenty percent of the associations between values and child outcomes were significant and of these 90% were with desirable school behaviors. Further, three of these predictive maternal values were unrelated to her education or occupation. The second part of the hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between fathers' levels of holding traditional values and their children's academic and social competence in school was not supported.

Clearly identification with more traditional American Indian values in mothers has a beneficial impact on their children's academic and social performance in school. The

overall picture presented is encouraging for those who have argued the importance of maintaining cultural identity among American Indians. What might account for the emergence of such a pattern? To begin with, children who come from families with a clear sense of cultural identity may be reaping the benefits of reduced anxiety over the issue of identity with their parents. In other words, adults who are secure in their identities as American Indians with traditional tribal values may be helping to provide a solid cultural identity core for their children. In turn this cultural sense of self allows for exploration of other cultures without threatening a basic American Indian identity.

Secondly, the pattern of a high degree of maternal identity with cultural values being associated with their children's better academic and social competence in school will not seem at all unusual to most Ojibwa, Odawa, or Potawatomi people of the Upper Great Lakes region. For these American Indian groups strong female leadership in both family and community has long been a part of the culture (Bay Mills Tribal Chairman, personal communication, May 4, 1990). Therefore, the fact that the role of women should be identified as particularly important in this study only follows logically from what many Native peoples would view as common sense.

All of the 6 predictors indicated that a higher SES (maternal education or occupation) was associated with greater adherence to traditional values. The presence of the Bay Mills Community College on the reservation undoubtedly served to

emphasize traditional Ojibwa values while at the same time providing the opportunity to obtain an associates degree. However, it is important to note that traditional maternal values do not predict school success only because of their association with higher SES. Three of the predictive traditional values, sharing, other-centeredness, and non-interfering, were not linked to occupation or education and yet they accounted for 45% of the significant values associated with school success. Clearly it is the maternal values that are critical.

The findings of this study suggest that American Indian cultural revitalization programs are important and should be integrated into education and family support systems. Furthermore, additional research in the area of American Indian values and school performance is essential. If the results of the Bay Mills study are replicated in larger samples of Ojibwa families and in many other American Indian communities perhaps culture will come to be viewed as a tool, not an obstacle, in enhancing the school performance of American Indian children.

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Table 1

Means and Standard deviations for Demographic in the Analyses

Variable	N	M	SD
Child's age	19	8.6	2.8
Child's grade	19	3.0	2.6
Mother's age	15	34.1	6.9
Father's age	14	33.7	7.7
Mother's yrs of education	15	12.9	1.9
Father's yrs of education	14	13.1	1.3
Mother's occupation[a]	11	5.6	1.1
Father's occupation[a]	12	4.0	2.0
Hrs/week M employed	11	40.3	3.0
Hrs/week F employed	12	37.7	14.0

Note. [a]Hollingshead's (1975) Four-Factor Index of Social Status rates occupations on a 9-point rating scale with 1 representing the lowest rating. A rating of 4 includes skilled manual workers and craftsmen; a rating of 5 includes clerical and sales workers.

Table 2

Significant Correlations Between the Cultural Values of Mothers and Fathers and the Children's Academic and Social Functioning

Cultural value	Outcome	N	r
	Mother's Values and Academic Functioning		
Sharing	Reading grade	14	.57*
	Language grade	14	.59*
	Science grade	14	.57*
	CBCL learning	12	-.61*
Other centered	Language grade	14	.57*
	Social studies grade[a]	12	.65*
	CBCL school perf.	13	-.62*
	CBCL learning	12	-.61*
Harmony with nature	Math grade	14	.66**
	CBCL learning	12	-.58*
Circular time	Social studies grade	12	-.77**
Extended family	Reading grade	14	.60*
	Language grade	14	.26*
	CBCL school perf.		
	Mother's Values and Social Functioning		
Other centered	CBCL works hard	12	-.86***
	CBCL anxious	14	.76**
	CBCL withdrawn	13	.58*
	CBCL inattentive	13	.82***

Table 2 (Continued)

Cultural value	Outcome	N	r
Harmony with nature	CBCL works hard	12	-.67*
	CBCL happy	9	-.96***
	CBCL anxious	14	.62*
	CBCL withdrawn	13	.87***
	Liked by others[b]	13	-.60*
	Dependable[b]	13	-.63*
	Future leader[c]	14	-.56*
Non-Interference	CBCL anxious[a]	14	-.54*
	CBCL self-destructive	13	.66*
	CBCL nervous	14	.62*
	Initiates activities[b]	14	-.56*
	Future leader[c]	14	-.58*
Extended family	CBCL unpopular	13	.71**
	CBCL obsessive	13	.56*
	CBCL inattentive	13	.66*
	Dependable[b]	13	-.60*
	Respect for others[b]	13	-.65*
	Take a joke[b]	14	-.55*
	Future leader[c]	14	-.64*
Patience	Initiates activities[ab]	14	.64*
	Future leader[ac]	14	.65*

Table 2 (Continued)

Cultural value	Outcome	N	r
	Father's Values and Academic Functioning		
Patience	Math	11	.61*
	Father's Values and Social Functioning		
Harmony with nature	Works hard	9	-.75*
	Unpopular	10	.63*
Non-confrontation	Unpopular	10	.65*

Note: CBCL = Achenbach's Child Behavior Check List; A positive correlation indicates an association between a more traditional value and better school academic adaptation.; A lower score on the measure of American Indian cultural value reflects a more traditional value. Therefore in the CBCL adaptive behavior categories of school performance, works hard, learning, and happy, and in the American Indian Check List and the Index of Future Comminity Leadership a negative correlation indicates an association between a more traditionl value and better school social adaptation. In the problem behavior categories of inattentive, anxious, withdrawn, self-destructive, nervous, unpopular, and obsessive a positive correlation indicates an association between a more traditional value and better school social adaptation.

Table 2 (Continued)

[a]Traditional values were linked to negative child outcomes; [b]American Indian Child Behavior Check List; [c]Index of Future Community Leadership.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Table 3

Significant Correlations Between Mothers' Levels of Holding Traditional Values and the Demographic Variables.

Cultural value	Antecedent	N	r
Harmony with nature	M's education	15	-.60*
	F's education	10	-.64*
Non-interference	F's occupation	8	-.78*
Extended family	F's occupation	8	-.88**
	M's occupation	11	.63*
Patience	M's occupation	11	-.76**

Note: M = Mother; F = Father

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$